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11. *Terrapene ornata* (Agassiz), Great Plains Box Turtle.

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CHARACTER AND FEEDING HABITS OF *FARANCIA ABACURA*, THE SO- CALLED "STINGING SNAKE."

The writer came to Clarksdale, Miss. 30 years ago, which then became his permanent official residence. Shortly after, stories were heard about the prevalence of numerous "stinging snakes" in the neighborhood, and a planter offered to bring him the next one found. In a few days on reaching his office he found a snake of unusual appearance awaiting him. It had just been killed, but had enough vitality for tail movements. It was carefully carried on a fire poker to the porch for good light. The poker was pressed on the tail, which set up a lively oscillation, and the observer distinctly saw a sting, protruded and withdrawn "in a flash," but saw no repetition of the exposure. A dissection showed the tail vertebræ descending in a diminuendo to the fine pointed extremity of the tail, and no place for a "sting." This shows that we are very likely to see what we expect to see, when snakes are involved; and the average person is prone to accept first impressions, and any extravagant statement about snakes without any inclination to verify, or disprove them.

Some weeks later the writer captured a live specimen of *Farancia* five feet long, when driving in a buggy in a road on the bank of a morass, from which the snake had evidently just emerged, as it had a bright shiny appearance, jet black with scarlet points extending up onto the sides at intervals of a few inches; and made a very handsome display.

One day the *Farancia* and a *Crotalus* were liberated together in a room. *Farancia* was first placed in the room, and was extended at full length near

one end of the room. The rattler, $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, was then introduced in a state of high irritation, having been hauled out of his box by a string around his neck. He took a position on one side of the room several yards from *Farancia*. The latter made no movement when the rattler appeared, except to open his mouth very wide, and kept it open.

Farancia abacura, when retreating from pursuit was observed to curl up the tip of the tail into a little vertical curl. After taking refuge in a patch of weeds, the snake when disturbed was found to have thrust its head down under the convolutions of the body, where it secured a hold on the roots or bottom of stalk of the weeds, either with the mouth or turns of the neck. The tail was conspicuously elevated and oscillated with much agility as if for defense.

When in captivity and frequently placed in a tub of water, the snake invariably and persistently explored around the bottom of the tub with its nose for some minutes, and then crawled out of the tub and endeavored to make its way to a ditch outside the yard, that contained some water and mud; and it showed a marked determination to reach the ditch. This specimen, five feet long, was wholly inoffensive and quite docile, and when being handled, showed a disposition to explore with its pendent tail, seeking any opening in the observer's garments in which to insert itself. It was not observed to actually coil its tail around any object. When liberated after six weeks' captivity the snake was placed near the water's edge and gently pushed into the water by the observer's foot in a bayou having a thick bed of soft mud. Whereupon the snake disappeared in a few seconds by burrowing head foremost into the mud. A gentlemen of veracity told the observer that he had seen one of these snakes with a "mud eel" in its mouth. Twenty-five or thirty years ago there were many marshy tracts and areas of low woodland in this neighborhood that were then being drained and

cleared, and this observer was informed by planters that numerous "stinging snakes" were found and killed in those localities. This observer having had many years of close association with marshes, brakes and bayous, in this region, has seen only one live specimen of *Farancia abacura* (except in the Memphis Zoo), the inference being that the snake is habitually concealed in the mud constituting its habitat.

Upon the above rather meager array of *facts*, the following hypothesis has been erected to account for the snakes feeding habits and manner of life.

Farancia abacura has its habitat in morasses and cypress brakes in the Yazoo basin and low grounds adjacent to the Mississippi river in the State of Mississippi. This reptile feeds upon the creatures that have their dwelling in the soft mud that constitutes its habitat, as salamanders, "mud eels," newts, "ground puppies," etc. When pursuing its prey in the mud, and after seizing it, the snake feels around with its tail to find a projecting root or other solid object, around which the tail is coiled in order to afford a "purchase" for withdrawing the victim from the surrounding medium of mud, and so enabling the snake to devour its catch. The long continuance and many repetitions of this performance has developed in the snake the habit, when approached menacingly, of concealing its head and flourishing its tail in a manner that is strongly suggestive of the use of the tail as a weapon; hence, the wide prevalence of the fallacious notion that it is possessed of a deadly sting.

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A LARGE COACH-WHIP SNAKE.

I have been interested in securing records regarding the largest size reached by the various species of snakes in Florida. Anyone having opportunity to measure really large individuals would confer a great favor by writing me. This spring Winthrop